



NEWS RELEASE

Conservation Partners to Host A Celebration of Wilderness Program

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The Virginia Wilderness Committee, Wild Virginia, and the USDA Forest Service will host A Celebration of Wilderness, at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, September 13, at the Lyric Theatre, Blacksburg, VA; and at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, September 27, at Martin Chapel, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA. The events are free and open to the public.

These special events are designed to appeal to anyone who appreciates the natural beauty found in Virginia's public lands, with a focus on designated Wilderness areas. The programs will provide an overview of the National Wilderness Preservation System, the importance of Wilderness now and in the future, the Wilderness areas in the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests in Virginia, and a look ahead to the future stewardship of Wilderness.

The events feature Bill Meadows, the former President of The Wilderness Society; and local natural history writer Chris Bolgiano, author of *The Appalachian Forest*, and co-author of *The Eastern Cougar*, and *Southern Appalachian Celebration: In Praise of Ancient Mountains, Old-Growth Forests, and Wilderness*.

Following their presentations, an interactive public discussion will explore the idea of Wilderness from ecological, cultural and aesthetic perspectives; Wilderness stewardship; and the roles of both the public and federal agencies in caring for public lands. More information about the events is available at <http://www.celebratewilderness.org>, or by calling 434-971-1647.

The 1.8 million acre George Washington and Jefferson National Forests include 23 Wildernesses totaling almost 140,000 acres. "Wilderness" is an area of public land designated by Congress to be protected and managed to preserve its natural conditions. It is an untrammeled, natural, undeveloped area of land where humans are visitors who do not remain, and which provides opportunities for solitude and primitive, unconfined recreation.

Formal "Wilderness" is a relatively new concept begun in 1964 with passage of The Wilderness Act, which established the National Wilderness Preservation System. Across the U.S., there are currently 757 Wildernesses totaling nearly 110 million acres in a wide range of ecosystems in 44 states and Puerto Rico. Threats to wilderness include non-native invasive species, air and water pollution, encroachments, and overuse in some areas.

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